



Green Your Yoga Gear

by Mary Ruth Belsey Priebe

Most budding yoga masters are striving (without straining) to improve their “oms,” uplift the soul, and get some good stretching in. And while Tree Yoga may extend a bit beyond that zone of ease for most of us, those with treehugging hearts hope to conduct their regular yoga practice without causing harm to the planet.

But is that even possible? After all, so many of the readily available yoga products are made from some not so earth-friendly ingredients.

Take yoga mats and blocks, for instance. Although they may see soft and comfy, most are actually made of polyvinyl chloride (PVC), better known as vinyl, and laced with phthalates. PVC is a known human carcinogen and producing this product results in a byproduct called dioxin which has been linked to numerous health conditions.

Phthalates are no friend of the earth, either. Used in many plastic products to make them flexible, phthalates can leach out over the life of your yoga products. They come with several detrimental health effects, but most notably can affect the reproductive health of both men and women. The effects on wildlife are suspected to be equally devastating.

But there’s more to yoga than the tools you use to deepen the stretch. The clothing, bolsters, bags, and straps, which are commonly made of a combination of polyester and cotton, could also be adding to the environmental burden created by your yoga routine.

Producing conventionally-grown cotton is incredibly water-intensive. Worse are the chemicals applied to the crops—cotton uses only 3 percent of the world’s agriculture land but consumes 25 percent of the pesticides and fertilizers produced. Polyester fibers aren’t

much better since they’re made of petroleum derivatives.

Don’t forget proper care for your yoga gear—you want it to last a good long while and to reduce the amount of garbage you produce. But regular soaps can contain unkind cleaning agents like alkylphenol ethoxylates (APEs) which are endocrine disruptors in birds, humans, and other mammals.

And regardless of whether you practice hatha, vinyasa, ashtanga, or bikram yoga, we need to stay hydrated. Disposable bottles of water not only support a dirty, unsustainable petroleum industry, the millions of trashed bottles pile up in landfills where they can take 700+ years to biodegrade.

Oh, the challenges of a well-meaning yoga enthusiast! What are we to do to green-up our yoga routine?

Well, if you’re looking for ways to benefit the earth in your daily practice, you’re in luck. There are many products now available for the green yoga devotee.

Look out for products with eco-friendly characteristics like natural, renewable, biodegradable materials that are free from toxic treatments. In mats, straps, blocks, and clothing, look for organic cotton, cork, bamboo, hemp, and natural rubber. Many brands specialize in eco-yogawear, including:

- Barefoot Yoga
- Gaiam
- Harmony
- Inner Waves Organics
- Jonano
- Lotus Organics
- Marika ShivalShakti Collection
- YOGO Eco-friendly Line

Good cleaning options are made from rapidly-biodegradable, nontoxic, plant-based ingredients, such as those found in these great products:

- Stirlen Yoga and Fitness Mat Cleaner
- Vermont Soap Organics Yoga and Exercise Mat Cleaner ☺